

# The Ballarat Naturalist

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## 2021 Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture

“Woodland Bird Habitat Restoration”

Presented by Emily Noble, Sanctuary Co-ordinator, Clarkesdale

I had the wonderful privilege of presenting the 43rd Annual Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture to 71 virtual attendees tuning-in via Zoom this year. Stella was a beloved and respected field naturalist in Ballarat for decades and has been an inspiration to me since I learnt of her exploits when I first joined the FNCB in 2013. It seemed appropriate to share the story of woodland bird conservation at Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary in this annual lecture that honours her memory, given her active involvement in the Sanctuary's early development from the late 1960s until her untimely death in the late 1970s.

Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary and its wonderful history of bird conservation exists because of Gordon Clarke (pictured below), a local land owner and keen birdwatcher described as a pioneer conservationist, who generously donated 265ha of land over a period of 21 years (from 1976 to 1996) to the Bird Observer's Club (now BirdLife Australia) and Trust for Nature to create the Sanctuary, then spent much of his time working on optimising its habitat values.





He also created a Trust Fund to provide for its ongoing maintenance and management. He was ably supported by countless volunteers, and his work has continued after his death in 1996 thanks to an impressive list of donors, the Trustees, BirdLife Australia and members of the local Ballarat branch, Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria, various management committees, past Sanctuary rangers and the Friends of Clarksdale. Members of the Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat have always played an important part too.

I have worked for BirdLife Australia as the Sanctuary's Coordinator since 2018, and I've had the opportunity to learn much about the history of the Sanctuary, its development, aims, management and context since Gordon's nephew and his family have shared many of Gordon's Sanctuary-related records with me this year. It includes hand-written records of his bird observations around the district back to 1921 (100 years ago!), when Gordon was just 14 years old and already a keen birder.



As a result of his astute observation and detailed record-keeping, Gordon recognised declines in the numbers of some of his favourite woodland birds like Regent Honeyeaters very early and made the causal link to the clearing of their habitat. Consequently, he bought his first 36ha of Heathy Dry Forest 80 years ago (in 1941) to save it from its imminent fate of clearing for grazing, for which it had been zoned.



He astutely and strategically chose land abutting State Forest. This block is known as the Jubilee Block and is the only block that is not contiguous with the rest of the Sanctuary.

His next judicious and timely purchase was in 1968 when he purchased the blocks now known as the Bird Paddock and Gordon's Lagoon. The impetus for this purchase was the sight of the incumbent owner felling the indigenous hardwood trees like the Yellow Box for fenceposts and firewood. Yellow Box was a favourite food tree for his beloved and now absent Regent Honeyeater and the host of the mistletoe that provided the preferred food for the now vulnerable Painted Honeyeaters that still visit each year to feed. Combatting fragmentation of habitat for the next two decades, he continued to re-consolidate the landscape by purchasing adjacent blocks and incorporating them under the cohesive management of the Sanctuary.

In purchasing these blocks, we are also incredibly fortunate that he acquired beautiful examples of vulnerable Valley Grassy Forest and endangered Plains Grassy Woodland that are still largely in excellent condition.





The Springdallah Creek runs through the middle of these two blocks. It contains vulnerable Creekline Herb-rich Vegetation that was highly infested by gorse when he bought the land. Over many years, he and a determined group of volunteers cleared the gorse and replaced it with a rich array of native shrubs to provide food, shelter and nesting sites for woodland birds. Clumps of native shrubs were also planted throughout the Bird Paddock and around Gordon’s Lagoon Block with careful species selection ensuring that there would be year-round sources of food for the birds.

Gordon donated the Jubilee Block, Golden Lake Block and Bird Paddock (including the Lagoon Block) to Bird Observer’s Club in 1976 for the purpose of establishing a bird sanctuary, and his vision for the Sanctuary was “to optimise, manage and create habitat at Linton to increase the diversity and population of native birds in perpetuity”, a vision just as relevant today.

As his property purchases and land donations continued, he added a pine plantation, pig farm, goat farm, residential properties, sheep farms, orchards, natural bushland and areas that had been subjected to gold mining, all with the goal of protecting or restoring their habitat values for birds. The blocks donated were all protected for conservation in perpetuity with Trust for Nature covenants or direct ownership.





In 1980, the Land Conservation Council of Victoria undertook its study of public land in the Ballarat area, with the surveyor Cliff Beaglehole actively assisted by Gordon Clarke, the extensive plant and bird records of Stella Bedggood and in-field guidance by Clare Miller and Bill and Pat Murphy, pre-eminent naturalists and birders very familiar with the natural values of the Linton Flora and Fauna Reserve, adjacent to Clarksdale.

As a result, Mr Beaglehole recommended that 270ha of public land be permanently gazetted as a flora and fauna reserve and managed as part of the Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary, expanding, buffering and linking the Sanctuary's diverse blocks together. The recommendation was formally adopted in 1989.

In the meantime, a Friends Group for the Sanctuary was formed in 1983 and is still going strong with over 60 members. The group holds regular working bees where they undertake a wide range of tasks (see below).





The Sanctuary, now 535 hectares, has many valuable bird habitat attributes: large old trees, mistletoe, standing dead trees, coarse woody debris, leaf litter, abundant hollows of every size, expanded nectar-feeding areas, permanent protection, multiple waterbodies and a waterway. A recent grant project funded by Golden Plains Shire further improved water security in the Sanctuary, allowing greater water capture, retention and distribution around the Sanctuary with a new water pump and 700m of water pipes installed between various wetlands and dams. When Latham's Snipe were recorded at Gordon's Lagoon in February, the Sanctuary joined Federation University's monitoring program for the species.



Thanks to a range of generous donors, the Clare Miller Environment Centre was opened in 2011 in the heart of the Sanctuary, a delightful venue where training sessions in best-practice habitat management and restoration, bird identification/ monitoring and various aspects of natural history are run. Local groups and businesses also hire it for meetings and planning days, which along with nature-based camping, helps to cover the Sanctuary's running costs.



In December 2020, BirdLife Australia released their Temperate Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan (CAP) to significantly improve the population trajectory of many woodland bird species currently declining across temperate regions in Australia by improving the management of their habitat.

Twenty-five of the 51 target threatened or declining woodland birds and 8 of the 10 target bird groups in the CAP have been recorded at Clarkesdale. Having such a long history of intentional management to optimise habitat for native birds, the CAP affirms the Sanctuary’s management approach given that it is already implementing all nine of the recommended management interventions relevant to Clarkesdale to some degree (the tenth refers to managing Noisy Miners, which aren’t found at Clarkesdale).



The next frontier for habitat management is the restoration of the grassy understorey, to extend and connect existing high quality remnants and improve the condition of degraded sections, so that seed-eaters such as vulnerable Diamond Firetails, Blue-winged & Red-rumped Parrots, Painted Button-quails and Red-browed Finches can sustain viable populations in the Sanctuary.



A healthy understorey will also benefit many other bird species, with the understorey being the foundation of the food-chain, a feeding and breeding resource for the many insects that in turn feed the insectivorous birds (i.e. robins, fantails, woodswallows, etc.), and a source of fine nesting material for birds like Diamond Firetails, Spotted Pardalotes and White-browed Scrubwrens, and nesting sites for Spotted Quail-thrush, Pacific Black Ducks and several other species.

Likewise, a healthy grassy understorey also provides suitable niches for a wide diversity of herbs, orchids and lilies, which in turn support a range of other species.

We are taking a multi-faceted approach to grassland management, including timely slashing to reduce the biomass and seeding of introduced grasses, targeted spraying, hand-weeding, rabbit control and seed collection & sowing.

A testament to the conservation efforts, generosity and foresight of people like Gordon Clarke and Stella Bedggood, the Sanctuary is brimming with life. I hope you have the opportunity to visit soon, enjoy one or more of the marked walks, join a bird survey, special event or working bee, book the Environment Centre or come and camp in this very peaceful place and enjoy the abundant birdlife.

*Emily Noble*

### Clarksdale- the Woodland Bird Conservation Action Plan incarnate in the Central Highlands





### Excursion to Enfield—November 7th 2021

On a cool, dull morning 14 field nats gathered and were welcomed by Emily and Peter at their block on the edge of Enfield State Forest. We did not have to walk very far to see good displays of late spring flowers. Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium stricta*, Milkmaids *Burchardia umbellata*, Trailing Goodenia *Goodenia lanata*, Wattle Mat-rush *Lomandra filliformis* and Many-flowered Mat-rush *Lomandra multiflora* were plentiful. Sun Orchids, Mantis Orchid and very tall Tiger Orchids growing up through Small Grasstrees attracted interest. Peter and Emily are making steady progress on the house and we were able to see the progress made with windows and doors installed since our last visit to Lillware.



Left: *Sterdium hirsutum*

Right: Slender Rice-flower *Pimelea linifolia*

Below: Spotted Sun-orchid *Thelymitra*



Walking into the adjacent Enfield State Forest, Emily showed us many interesting plants. Ivy-leaved Violets *Viola hederacea* were common. The small Hidden Violet *Viola cleistogamoides* was harder to find. It has tiny cream-coloured petals on short stems.





Sticky Boronia  
*Boronia  
anemonifolia*

After lunch our first stop was at Victoria Dam where we saw Flying Duck-orchid *Caleana major*, Smooth Parrot-pea *Dillwynia glaberrima*, Slender Pimelea *Pimelea linifolia*, Heath Teatree *Leptospermum myrsinoides* and Grey Everlasting *Ozothmanus obcordatus*.



At a short stop at the powerline easement there was a field of Common Trigger-plant *Stylidium armeria*, Twining Fringe-lily *Thysanotus patersonni*, Pink Bells *Tetratheca ciliata*, and Myrtle Wattle *Acacia myrtifolia* with seed pods. Not surprisingly, we also saw a Blue-banded Bee (*Amegilla* sp.).



We saw the damage caused by the recent strong winds. Many trees had lost branches which had been snapped off while a few trees were flattened with roots pulled out of the ground. Some interesting birds seen and heard during the day included Olive-backed Oriole, Crimson Rosella, Grey Thrush, Pipit and Blue-winged Parrot. A Great Cormorant was perched on a dead tree in the dam and Wood Duck and Australasian Grebe were swimming. Pobblebonks were calling around the dam.

On the slashed area around Beacon Hill we found Button Everlasting *Coronidium scorpiodes*, Dwarf Boronia *Boronia nana*, Common Apple-berry *Billardiera mutabilis* (see below) and Purple Beard-orchid *Calochilus roberstonii*.



Above: Tall Sundew  
*Drosera peltata*



The cool cloudy weather meant that most sun-orchid flowers were not open but Emily identified the Rush-leaf Sun-orchid *Thelymitra juncifolia* by its narrow leaves and small flowers with dark spots on the petals.



Our final stop for the day was the Mt Misery Garden Flora Reserve along Misery Creek Road. Emily had recently discovered Tall Daisy *Brachyscome diversifolia* (see below) growing along the roadside. It has divided hairy leaves and large flowers with white petals and a yellow centre. This plant is uncommon in the Ballarat area.

Another uncommon plant seen was a Ranges Leek-orchid *Prasophyllum* sp. aff. *odoratum* 6. It has small, well-spaced flowers along a tall spike.

Thanks to Emily for sharing her knowledge of the plants found in different parts of the Enfield forest. *John Gregurke*



Thanks to John Gregurke  
and Carol Hall for photographic contributions (ed).

<b>Short Excerpt from Club Meeting held Fri Nov 5, 2021</b>		
<b>Opening and Apologies</b>		
Attendance: President Bill Elder welcomed 24 members and 47 visitors to the Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture meeting.		
Apologies received from: Juliana Addison MP, Cr Peter Eddy.		
Motion: that the Apologies be accepted.		
Moved: K. Elder	Seconded: C. Hall	<b>Carried.</b>
<b>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</b>		
Motion: that the Minutes of the previous Meeting (October 1, 2021) be accepted as a true and accurate record.		
Moved: C. Hall	Seconded: G. Lunt	<b>Carried.</b>



## Congratulations to GSB 2021 Ballarat Region Contributors

Over the course of three days from midnight Saturday Oct 23 to Monday Oct 25, the challenge of the Great Southern Bioblitz 2021 was conducted.

This annual event was inaugurated last year to give residents in the Southern Hemisphere the opportunity to observe and record species in the springtime as the rest of the world holds their Bioblitzs in our autumn.

Our contribution of 1,010 observations from just 33 observers yielded 427 species, identified by 122 official identifiers.

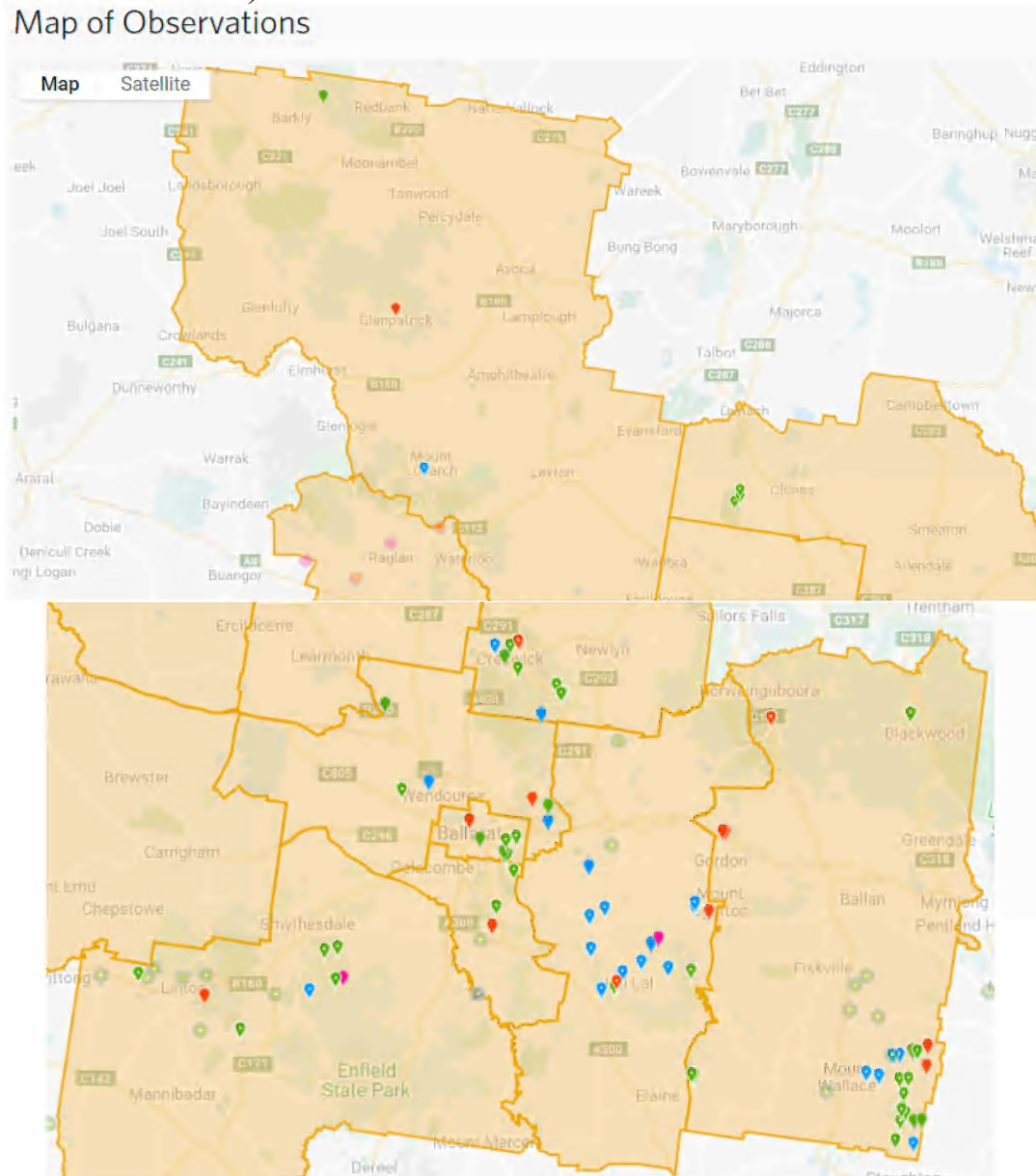
This is a great effort from a small number of keen naturalists from throughout the region.

Observations are recorded and mapped on the online database













“iNaturalist” and, as the maps below show, they ranged from the very north of the

Pyrenees Shire down to the southern end of Moorabool Shire (green, blue and red dots).

Map of Observations





Most Observations			Most Species		
	cygnet	209		cygnet	133
	vireyajacquard	151		vireyajacquard	94
	graemelunt	131		enfieldservices	81
	enfieldservices	109		graemelunt	80
	helenschofield	85		helenschofield	56
	benfish	69		benfish	37
<a href="#">View All</a> <a href="#">View Yours</a>			<a href="#">View All</a> <a href="#">View Yours</a>		

Of the 33 observers, the observer making the most observations was “cygnet” (aka Elspeth S), followed closely by Vireya J. and Graeme L., and also Emily N. Of course, these four members are major contributors to the club’s online presence on website, blog and our monthly newsletter. Vireya and Graeme are prolific contributors to the club’s iNaturalist pages. Many contributors of GSB observations this year came from people outside the club, so it is nice that they took an interest and helped the cause with their photos and records.

If you’d like to explore the information collected during this unique event more closely go to:  
<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/great-southern-bioblitz-2021-ballarat-region>



Blotched  
 Blue-tongue  
*Tiliqua nigrolutea*

For the record, GSB2021 worldwide yielded over 177,900 observations for more than 28,000 species, all uploaded over the four days! An amazing effort!



### Enfield Grevillea Fire Research

After a meeting in November, attended by both Secretary Emily Noble and immediate past President John Gregurke, research into how Enfield Grevillea *Grevillea bedggoodiana* responds to fire is set to go ahead in December and field nats are invited to take part!

Monitoring of plants and their environment will need to be done before, during and after any fire treatments. DEWLP hope to involve PhD candidates from LaTrobe University to assist in addition to volunteers from our ranks.

There will be four sites to cater for 3 different treatments and a control.

Monitoring begins from Monday Dec 6, so if you're interested in participating in this important work, please refer to the email sent by Emily which provides details of a webinar you can attend this week, and the contact details for the Project Co-ordinator .



### More Enfield Images from Carol Hall

Left: 'unknown' sun-orchid

Right: Anthelid moth caterpillar  
(colloquially known as a "Woolly Bear")



## **Excursions and Meetings in 2021 - For your Diary!**

**Dec 3 Friday:** Club meeting 7.30pm at Gillies St campus of Fed Uni. Also live via Zoom (link to be sent a couple of days prior) This is a Members' images evening - "Highlights from 2021". We will also discuss the need for more active involvement by members leading into the AGM in March 2022.  
Be prepared to check in and show vaccination status on arrival.

**Dec 5 Sunday:** Excursion to Flagstaff Hill, Pittong and Christmas "break-up" at Clarkesdale.  
Car pool at Gillies St at 1.30pm OR meet outside Linton Pub at 2.00pm to convoy to Flagstaff Hill. We will look at two very different sections of this Granitic Sands Grassy Woodland reserve managed by Ballarat Environment Network.  
The day concludes with a short bird walk and our annual BYO picnic tea in the beautiful venue that is Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary.

**Feb 4 Friday:** Club Meeting      To Be advised

**Feb 6 Sunday:** Excursion      To Be advised

*Please note that you must be double-vaccinated when taking part in face-to-face club activities.*

*If you are not well or are suffering any flu-like symptoms, please stay at home.*

### **Committee**

President	Bill Elder
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Kathy Elder
	Andy Arnold
	Bernadette Cheesman
	Val Hocking
	Graeme Lunt
	John Petheram

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**Meetings** - due to COVID-19, meetings may have number limits applied. Members will be kept informed of any restrictions as needed.

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